

New York Potato Promotion

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I received a NY Ag + Markets FAID grant in 2006. A number of people that would be involved in the project got together and we discussed the best way to accomplish the goal of promoting NY potatoes. First, we felt we needed to gather more culinary information on an expanded list of potato varieties grown in NY. And second, we felt we needed local involvement with chefs throughout NY. We wanted chefs throughout NY to speak for us, the potato industry.

In 2006 and 2007, we continued with the organic trials on Jean-Paul Corten's Roxbury Farm in Kinderhook, NY, Ron Kosela farm in New Paltz and Paul and Sandy Arnold from Pleasant Valley Farm, Argyle, NY. Each year we evaluated 18 different varieties for leafhopper resistance. We now feel we have some very good data on which varieties hold up to leafhopper pressure.

We also continued with the trials at three culinary schools, Schenectady County Community College (SCCC), The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) and Rochester Institute of America (RIT). Each year we gave the schools different varieties. We needed to get a wide range of data covering the many of the varieties grown in NY. The culinary schools could only do 8 varieties at a time so we had to gather information over a longer time period. We really wanted to have good data backing up our promotional push. These three institutions have also been very helpful in making useful contacts within the culinary community.

A meeting was held with Steven Hengst, Senior Communications Manager (head of promotions) from the CIA. He helped us come up with many promotion ideas. He also gave us contact names that would be interested in working with us on this project.

We were invited to Washington DC to showcase the potato culinary use idea at the "Foods of New York" day sponsored by with Senators Clinton and Schumer. The CIA helped us in this by preparing a red, white and blue patriotic potato salad using NY varieties. It was a big hit at the event. Senator Clinton had three servings.

The oldest and most prestigious restaurant in Albany, Jack's, has trialed 7 varieties provided them. Their owner is a Cornell Hotel School graduate and their head Chef is a CIA graduate. Jack's owner, Brad Rosenstein, is on the board of the New York Restaurant Association and has agreed to help promote the potato culinary use idea to its members. We need people other than Cornell or potato growers to speak for us and help promote potatoes. This winter, we hope to do the same trial in 50-60 NY fine restaurants. Hopefully these restaurants, with the help of Pride of New York, will be able to spread the potato promotional information. We need to educate people in many different ways.

Professor Don Halseth, Pat Sheldon (potato farmer) and I met with Sue Santamarina of "Pride of NY". They have been doing generic promotion of NY produce and were looking for a commodity to focus on. They have decided to use potatoes as their first specific commodity promotion.

Professor Don Halseth, Pat Sheldon and I met with Don Benjamin, the Northeast Regional Director of the New York State Restaurant Association (NYSRA) and Tony Panza, President of the Greater Capital Chapter to discuss potato promotion. The meeting went very well. The NYRA is willing to work with us on putting potato promotion on their educational programming and newsletters. They want to sponsor a contest between culinary schools on using NY potatoes. A very productive working relationship seems to be starting.

During the summer of 2007, potatoes were grown at the Sheldon farm for distribution to restaurants in eastern NY. We grew 6 varieties. The potatoes were bagged and are stored at the AJ Ranella wholesalers warehouse in Albany. Don Benjamin from the NYSRA supplied a list of restaurants and their chefs. Beginning in January 9, we will distribute six ten pound bags of different NY varieties to these restaurants. There is an evaluation form with the potatoes so the restaurants can return to us their opinions of the potatoes. The purpose of the evaluation is to get the restaurants involved in promoting locally grown NY potatoes. The Pride of NY program will work with the restaurants in getting local media exposure and promotion of locally grown NY potatoes.

Professor Walter DeJong and I are meeting with Dan Barber, owner and head chef at Blue Barns Restaurant in Westchester County. There is a farm connected to the restaurant. We had a small variety trial on his farm in 2007. He had expressed interest in growing any unusual potato varieties Cornell might have. In exchange, he is willing to give the Cornell potato breeding program and NY potatoes national exposure. We are looking to show everyone how NY has one of the best potato breeding programs in the US. We also want to emphasize NY potatoes as being of high quality. Dan Barber is a nationally recognized food expert and has appeared on Dateline as well as in many national publications.

Have met with the culinary program director at Schenectady County Community College and set a tentative date for the Potato Educational Day. We will have two meetings, one in Eastern NY and another in Western NY. This will be a lunch-time meeting where chefs, produce buyers and food industry people will sample dishes prepared with NY potato varieties and hear about the culinary information we have been gathering for the last couple years. The focus will be on educating the food industry on NY locally grown potatoes. The meeting at SCCC will be February 28. The Commissioner of Agriculture Hooker, Reahael Ray and First Lady Silda Wall were invited to this meeting.

We are working on putting together the Potato Culinary Usage Guide. Input from the various culinary schools and selected Chefs will be used to rate the different potato varieties on their culinary properties. This will be a valuable tool for consumers as well as growers. Consumers, whether they are the public, produce buyers or chefs will be able

to know how a specific potato variety will perform. Growers will find this especially useful, as they will have an extra marketing tool to be able to sell their potatoes by culinary use. The goal is to have the Potato Culinary Guide finished by Xmas.

We wanted to build solid support throughout the food industry before we went ahead with the promotion. We felt it would be better to have as many people working with us than just going at this by ourselves. To that end, I feel we have gathered a large amount of support for successful promoting NY potatoes to a very wide audience.